

they introduced a partisan bill that would undermine America's security. This bill is unwise. The House leaders know that the Senate will not pass it. And even if the Senate did pass it, they know I will veto it.

Yesterday the Attorney General and the Director of National Intelligence sent a leader to the Speaker explaining why the bill is dangerous to our national security. They cited a number of serious flaws in the bill, including the following.

First, the House bill could reopen dangerous intelligence gaps by putting in place a cumbersome court approval process that would make it harder to collect intelligence on foreign terrorists. This is an approach that Congress explicitly rejected last August when bipartisan majorities in both Houses passed the Protect America Act. And it is an approach the Senate rejected last month when it passed a new—new legislation to extend and strengthen the Protect America Act by an overwhelming vote of 68 to 29.

Now House leaders are proposing to undermine this consensus. Their partisan legislation would extend protections we enjoy as Americans to foreign terrorists overseas. It would cause us to lose vital intelligence on terrorist threats, and it is a risk that our country cannot afford to take.

Second, the House bill fails to provide liability protection to companies believed to have assisted in protecting our Nation after the 9/11 attacks. Instead, the House bill would make matters even worse by allowing litigation to continue for years. In fact, House leaders simply adopted the position that class-action trial lawyers are taking in the multibillion-dollar lawsuits they have filed. This litigation would undermine the private sector's willingness to cooperate with the intelligence community, cooperation that is absolutely essential to protecting our country from harm. This litigation would require the disclosure of state secrets that could lead to the public release of highly classified information that our enemies could use against us. And this litigation would be unfair because any companies that assisted us after 9/11 were assured by our Government that their cooperation was legal and necessary.

Companies that may have helped us save lives should be thanked for their patriotic

service, not subjected to billion-dollar lawsuits that will make them less willing to help in the future. The House bill may be good for class-action trial lawyers, but it would be terrible for the United States.

Third, the House bill would establish yet another commission to examine past intelligence activities. This would be a redundant and partisan exercise that would waste our intelligence officials' time and taxpayers' money.

The bipartisan House and Senate intelligence and judiciary committees have already held numerous oversight hearings on the Government's intelligence activities. It seems that House leaders are more interested in investigating our intelligence professionals than in giving them the tools they need to protect us. Congress should stop playing politics with the past and focus on helping us prevent terrorist attacks in the future.

Members of the House should not be deceived into thinking that voting for this unacceptable legislation would somehow move the process along. Voting for this bill does not move the process along. Instead, voting for this bill would make our country less safe because it would move us further away from passing the good bipartisan Senate bill that is needed to protect America.

The American people understand the stakes in this struggle. They want their children to be safe from terror. Congress has done little in the 3 weeks since the last recess, and they should not leave for their Easter recess without getting the Senate bill to my desk.

Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 9:20 a.m. on the South Lawn at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Attorney General Michael B. Mukasey. He also referred to H.R. 3773.

Remarks Following a Briefing By Provincial Reconstruction Team Leaders and Brigade Combat Commanders

March 13, 2008

As you can see here on the screen in front of me, we've got assembled in Afghanistan—

thanks to Ambassador Wood—PRTs, which is Provincial Reconstruction Teams, made up of military and civilian personnel, all aiming to help the Afghans recover from unbelievable brutality of the Taliban and have a society that's capable of meeting the needs of its people. We've also got two members of the PRT here present with us.

Our strategy in Afghanistan is, one, to provide enough security so civil society can move forward. Any counter—effective counter-insurgency strategy will require more than just military action; it requires a military-civilian interface. And so if you look on the screen, you see brave and courageous Americans in uniform and not in uniform, because they're a part of this strategy to help Afghans, one, understand the blessings of good governance. In other words, the folks are attempting to fight corruption at the local level so that the local citizens are able to have a positive outlook about their government. We're also working to educate people, build roads, provide good health care. And our fellow citizens are there on the ground, in some difficult circumstances, all aiming to help this young democracy survive and thrive. And there are difficulties, but we're also making progress.

And the best thing we got going for us—not only do we have brave and compassionate citizens willing to serve, but we've also got an ideology based upon liberty, which stands in stark contrast to the ideology of the thugs and murderers called the Taliban. And the job of hand is to help these folks recover, help the Afghans realize there's a better future for them. And it's hard work, but it's necessary work for the security of our country.

And so it's been a great pleasure for senior members of my administration to hear the stories and to hear the issues that they face. I'm enriched by the experience, and I do want to thank you very much for serving our country. And as I mentioned to you earlier, please thank your families for them standing by you during these—during your time of service.

God bless you all, and thank you for your time.

NOTE: The President spoke at 11:27 a.m. in the Roosevelt Room at the White House.

Statement on Farm Legislation

March 13, 2008

The Congress has agreed on legislation to extend current farm programs to April 18, 2008. I will sign this legislation to avoid serious disruptions that might result if the current law is allowed to expire without a responsible farm bill enacted in its place. Farmers and ranchers deserve to know the structure of policies that affect their day-to-day business activities, and right now they face uncertainty.

Throughout this process, my goal has been and remains to sign a good farm bill. Over 1 year ago, following listening sessions across the Nation, the Department of Agriculture unveiled a reform-minded and fiscally responsible approach to supporting America's farmers and ranchers. My proposal would provide agriculture producers with a safety net that better targets benefits and provides funding for emerging priorities. Today's farm economy is very strong, and Congress should not miss this opportunity to reform current farm programs.

My administration has been eager to work with Congress. We have offered legislative language and a list of potential spending offsets to ensure Congress does not increase taxes. And while insisting on significant program reforms, we have demonstrated flexibility on how to achieve real reform. I have also made it clear that any final farm bill that includes a tax increase or does not include reform will be met with a veto. These negotiations have taken place in good faith with the goal of reaching a final agreement that meets the needs of farmers and enjoys the support of America's taxpayers.

This legislation to extend current farm programs will provide more time for Congress to reach an agreement. If a final agreement is not reached by April 18, I call on Congress to extend current law for at least 1 year. While long-term extension of current law is not the desired outcome, I believe the Government has a responsibility to provide America's farmers and ranchers with a timely and predictable farm program, not multiple